

## Reflection #14



The church of Saint Anne is in the Muslim quarter of the old city of Jerusalem. The church was built by the crusaders. Today though it is well known for its amazing acoustics. The chances are very good that when we walk the small church someone will break into song.

This is an old church; but it is not ancient church.

One of the key components of the pilgrimage will be to navigate the old from the really old, the ancient and the modern. Each layer you encounter will have the shape of legacy.

Jerusalem is a city of legacies. There is the ancient "City of David" and there is also the Muslim belief that this was the site where Abraham sought to sacrifice Ishmael (not Isaac). The first is a legacy of 3000 years; the second a bit more than 1500 years. Jerusalem is the place of the first temple (Solomon) and the second temple (Herod). The first was destroyed in 576 BC; the

second was destroyed in 70 AD. Saint Anne's is roughly 800 years old. Needless to say, pilgrims have been coming to this city.

After Constantine converted we have record that the city quickly became a destination for the Christian pilgrim. The most holy site of all being the "Anastasia" or Resurrection Church as it was known prior to the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Before the 11<sup>th</sup> century there was a grand 4<sup>th</sup> century church built by Helena, the mother of Constantine. Yet, shortly before the turn of the millennium, a Fatimid prince who was annoyed by the stream of Christians in the city ordered the church to be destroyed. Nearly every part was torn down. The current church, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is the surviving remnant of the former building with additions and modest restorations done by the crusaders.

Church construction like St. Anne's and church restoration as one completed for the Holy Sepulchre was the main goal of the crusaders. Beginning in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and lasting for nearly two hundred years, the crusaders built spiritual fortresses. Their goal was to create a safe place for pilgrims to worship in Jerusalem. To accomplish this they not only built churches and restored holy sites, they also built castles and fortifications throughout Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The crusader castles are amazing works of engineering that exist today as a testament to their ingenuity.

Although it is not as obvious as the acoustics, St. Anne's is not only a legacy of worship and pilgrimage, it is also a legacy of warfare and conquest. In order to "secure" the pilgrim path, the crusaders waged war for two centuries. There was never a time of peace in the Kingdom of Jerusalem (the crusader's designation for their conquests). When you enter St. Anne's this violence is not evident. It is a place of austere beauty and acoustic perfection. The Romanesque style with windows above offering a diffused light to the space accomplishes the sense of mystery they believed a place of worship should embody. Beauty, perfection, and mystery are not words that are often associated with warfare and conquest.

This contradiction is the most important part of the visit to St. Anne's. As we venture along the way from Bethlehem to Tiberius and then on to Jordan, we will encounter many places that reflect the current reality of warfare and conquest. When we visit Beit Shean we will be in the disputed West Bank. When we visit Bethlehem, we will need to ride a bus that is sanctioned by the Palestinians. There will be many places and signs that we are traveling through the living legacy of warfare and conquest.

What does it mean for you to be walking in "occupied" territory? Can a pilgrim pass through such places and be neutral? Is there a side you are on that may be at odds with someone else on our pilgrimage? The debate over the Modern State of Israel is a fierce one. What will you see on your visit and how will that reflect your opinion and belief?

As this is my fifth time I can tell you the questions above are part of the experience. On the one hand it is easy to look to the Modern State of Israel and say, "these folks are just the latest ones to conquer the land." This is very true. The list of conquerors is long. Conquest is the history

of the “Levant” or land leading to the sea. The Levant has been a prize sought by many for its strategic advantage for trade and military action. Yet, the Levant is also the prize sought by the ones who seek to worship. This is the third holiest site in Islam; it is Zion to the Jews; it’s only rivaled by Rome in the Christian tradition. Many times Jerusalem has been captured or defended solely for religious reasons. This is a very complex legacy.

There is yet another layer to this. Jerusalem is the city known as the place where “prophets go to die.” The legacy of conquest then is also more simply a legacy of violence. When we walk through the ancient city we will begin at the Lion’s gate in the Muslim quarter. This is just a short distance from St. Anne’s. We will walk the stages of the cross. This is the path that Jesus walked in the old city, a path that ended in violence.

Part of the preparation for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land is to grapple with the question of conquest. Please know that this is a topic that often inspires heated debate. As part of the Pilgrimage I would encourage you to read one of the many books written about the modern state of Israel. This is a tough topic with a lot of complexity. If you take the time, though, such reading will add a depth to your experience.